

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Required Report - public distribution

Date:

GAIN Report Number:

Syria

COUNTRY FAIRS REPORT

FAIRS Country Report

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Report Highlights:

Some change has taken place since the report was last submitted in 2000. Syria is permitting imports of processed foods gradually and the list of permitted imports is expanding. An import permit is necessary. Shipment documents have to be notarized by the Syrian Embassy in the country of origin. Syrian labeling regulations do not provide for GMO, organic foods, nutrient contents, additives, and pesticide residues. Food additives are permitted in general as long as they are permitted to be used in the country of origin. Syrian customs does not permit custom clearing of food stuffs if half the shelf life has passed. The presence of information in Arabic on the label by the producer is very important.

Section I. Food Laws:

Syria had a very restrictive agricultural and food import regime to protect local production and to save hard currency. Most consumer-ready foods and beverages were not permitted to be imported. Bulk commodities were permitted to be imported if there is shortage in local production. In addition, fruits and vegetables were not permitted to be imported. This strict import regime started to loosen after Syria applied to the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) about seven years ago. Most food items are permitted to be imported now and the list of permitted products is expanding. Imports of cigarettes, wine, and other alcoholic beverages are restricted to public sector companies.

An import permit is necessary to import every commodity. It is obtained from the Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The prior approval of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform is sometimes necessary for some commodities.

The Ministry of Economy and Trade is planning to publish a list of products that can not be imported (negative list). This may take a few years to implement. Food import laws were very effective and were enforced by the customs department.

Section II. Labeling Requirements:

The Syrian Ministry of Economy and Trade sets the labeling requirements for foods and the Customs Department implements these requirements on imported packaged food commodities.

Section III. Packaging and Container Regulations:

1. All packs of imported food stuffs should include the following basic information in Arabic: Brand name, producer's name, country of origin, date of production, date of expiry, net weight or size, and ingredients. Batch number is necessary for certain processed products.
2. All this information has to be put in Arabic. Other languages can also be put on the label provided the required information is present in Arabic.
3. A product with the standard U.S. label cannot be imported according to the Ministry of Economy and Trade instructions since it does not include the required information in Arabic.
4. Labels have to be printed on the container, or placed on the container at the time of production and cannot be added after the goods arrive. Stick-on labels, meeting local requirements cannot be put by the importer.
5. The labeling regulations are very much enforced. The label has to be applied by the producer, prior to export.
6. This applies to all product packages including institutional packs. Sample sized products are not common in this market, but are subject to the same labeling regulations. One container samples (usually less than three kilograms in weight), sent usually by the exporter by mail to be used by the

importer as a sample and will not be sold to the public are not subject to the same strict labeling requirements.

7. Local labeling requirements do not include Recommended Daily Intake (CDI).

8. Shelf-life is usually determined by the producer. However, the date of production and expiration date cannot be added to the label as a sticker. It has to be printed on the label or printed/engraved on the metal container in the country of origin. Food commodities cannot be cleared through customs if half their validity dates have passed.

9. Exceptions to labeling regulations are not usually granted. However, food commodities given as a donation by international organizations or by other governments are usually exempt from the Arabic language writing.

B. Requirements Specific to Nutritional Labeling: Due to the ban on imports of most processed/packed food products for many years, nutritional labeling is not provided for in labeling requirements. There are no regulations regarding health claims.

Section VI. Other Regulations and Requirements:

Section VII. Other Specific Standards:

Since most processed/frozen foods were not permitted to be imported to Syria, there are no other specifications other than conformity with the Syrian standards issued by the General Authority for Standardization and Metrology. It is the duty of the importer to contact this organization and get the specifications before contracting for importing any food item.

Packaged/frozen animal and poultry meat from animals slaughtered according to the Islamic doctrine have a certain phrase stating the slaughter under the Islamic doctrine on the pack.

Section VIII. Copyright and/or Trademark Laws:

Trademarks and/or brand names are protected under domestic law provided the trade mark or brand name is registered at the Office of Intellectual Property Protection, Ministry of Economy and Trade. There are limitations on trade marks and brand name registration. Trade marks prohibited under the foreign trade regulations cannot be registered. This is mainly for local production. However, the same brand name can be imported by more than one importer from the same producer.

Section IX. Import Procedures:

The customs clearing process starts with the arrival of the shipment at the port, its documents to the bank, collecting the samples for testing, obtaining the test results, obtaining the permission to release from customs (this is obtained from the Foreign Trade Department of the Ministry of Economy and Trade), and finally payment of the customs duties. There are no customs duties on foods produced by Arab countries under the GAFTA agreement. The customs clearance procedure takes about one week and is done by a customs clearer assigned by the importer. To be released from customs, all the customs clearing procedures should be finished before half the validity date of the product is

over. Import documents in English do not have to be translated into Arabic.

If a shipment is rejected, there is an appeal system, but it is subject to the approval of the minister under whom the rejection took place. If it is a labeling problem, the Minister of Economy and Trade would be the concerned minister. If the problem is with grain specifications, the appeal has to be addressed to the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform who may personally approve the appeal once and permit the collection of another sample for testing. If a second rejection takes place, the commodity has, by law, to be returned to the country of origin.

Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts:

Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform

Hijaz Square, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 2213613/4

Fax: (963-11) 2244078 and 2244023

Central Feed Laboratory

Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, P.O. Box 12827, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 6313017

The laboratory does not have a fax or E-mail address.

Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ibn Nafis Highway, Damascus, Syria

Phones: (963-11) 5137334/8/9

Fax: (963-11) 5122390

Central Laboratory

Bab Tuma, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 5425828

Fax: (963-11) 5420953

Atomic Energy Authority

Ghezawi Street, Mazzeh, Damascus, Syria

Phone: (963-11) 6111926/7

Fax: (963-11) 6112289

For further help please contact the Office of Agricultural Affairs, American Embassy, P.O. Box 29, Damascus, Syria, Phone: (963-11) 33914127, Fax: (963-11) 33914100, E-mail: Jaber.Dalati@usda.gov